



## Case report

Unexpected suicide and irrational thinking in adolescence: A case report<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This report aims to draw attention to the fragility of adolescents' mind and irrational thinking in adolescence that might lead to suicide due to unusual experiences, by presenting a case of completed suicide with its unusual etiology.

The victim, a 13 years old boy, had a quarrel with his mother as she sacrificed his pet, a cock, to prepare for dinner. Because of this, the victim had denied to join the family for dinner and wanted to be alone. While the family having dinner, a passing by neighbor realized that the victim was suspended with a ligature around his neck, in the backyard of the house. Meaningfully, there were feathers of cock in pants pockets of the deceased, in the corpse examination.

Adolescents are experiencing dramatic physical and emotional changes, and being oversensitive and fragile in that period of life. Thus, a life experience that is tolerable to adults might badly affect adolescents and lead to suicide which is incomprehensible to them.

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## 1. Introduction

Suicide can be described as death in which one makes an intentional, direct, and conscious effort to end one's life. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in suicides among children and adolescents. Childhood suicides comprise approximately 10% of all suicidal cases in many countries<sup>1,2</sup>. Suicide is regarded as an important issue in childhood and adolescence, since it has been reported as the second or fourth most common cause of death in this age group<sup>2–6</sup>.

The etiologies of suicidal behaviors are ranged in a wide spectrum. The strongest risk factors for childhood and adolescent suicides are mental disorders such as mood disorders, substance abuse and antisocial behavior<sup>7,8</sup>. However, unusual life experiences might lead to unexpected suicides in this age group, because of the fragility of adolescents' mind. In this particular developmental period of individuals, psychologically normal adolescents might have irrational beliefs linked to a low frustration tolerance and to

a tendency to dramatize situations. In such situations adolescents tend to exaggerate and interpret reality in a wrong way that leads them to suffer<sup>9</sup>.

This presentation was aimed to report an unusual case of unexpected suicide due to sacrificing one's favorite pet animal in order to draw attention to the fragility of adolescents' mind and irrational thinking in adolescence.

## 2. Case history

The victim, a 13 years old boy, had reported to accept a cock as his favorite pet, which is not common in Turkey. One day upon coming home the victim realized that his pet was killed and had a quarrel with his mother as she sacrificed his favorite animal to prepare for dinner. Because of this, the victim had denied to join the family for dinner and left the home for a while. While the family having dinner, a passing by neighbor realized that the victim was suspended, in the backyard of house, with a ligature around his neck. The case was reported to death, on the way to hospital.

The scene examination did not reveal any considerable finding. Meaningfully, there were a pack of feathers of cock in pants pockets of the deceased (Fig. 1). At autopsy, external examination of deceased revealed petechial hemorrhages on both eyes

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Fig. 1. Feathers of cock inserted in the pockets.

conjunctivae, congestion on the face and a single typical external ligature mark surrounding the neck (Fig. 2). Internal examination revealed hemorrhages at the connections of neck muscles with clavicles and sternum but there were no hemorrhages in the anterior aspect of lumbal region of the vertebral column. Additionally there were no soft-tissue hemorrhages, hyoid bone or larynx cartilage fractures, as well. There were no perineal or anal trauma findings or any other traumatic changes that could be attributable to physical or sexual assault. A complete toxicological analysis was also performed, and no trace of illicit drugs or alcohol was found in the blood and organ samples. Death was attributed to asphyxia due to hanging.

Interviewing with family members indicated that, family had been living on farming, and had one young and one grown child. Deceased had lived with his parents and elder brother. The psychiatric status of



Fig. 2. Typical external ligature mark on the neck.

the victim, according to the family members, relatives, friends and victim's teachers was quite normal, without psychological diseases or problems that could trigger a suicide attempt.

### 3. Discussion

Suicide is regarded as an important problem in adolescence, since it has been reported as one of the rapidly increasing cause of death in this age group<sup>2,4</sup>. A review of the literature has demonstrated that suicide rates are very low in the 10–14 age group. However, the first suicide attempts are generally made before 18 years of age; furthermore, the mean age of suicide attempters, at first attempt, was reported to be 13.6 in Glowinski et al<sup>5,10,11</sup>.

The risk factors leading to suicidal behaviors are ranged in a wide spectrum, and differ according to age, sex, and socio-cultural characteristics. The strongest risk factors for early adolescence suicides are mental disorders, substance abuse and antisocial behavior. Furthermore, the existence of a psychopathological history is accepted as an important factor in suicidal behavior<sup>7,8</sup>. On the contrary to this, the previous psychiatric status of the presented victim was stated to be quite normal, without psychological diseases or problems that could trigger a suicide attempt.

Methods used in suicides are known to vary with respect to age, sex, and social and cultural factors. In certain studies conducted in Turkey, shooting was found to be the most common method, with 43.4% in Diyarbakir and 51.2% in Istanbul. However, a study previously conducted by our team revealed that hanging was the most common suicidal method in adolescence<sup>1,4,10</sup>. The presented case preferred hanging as suicidal method because of easy accessibility to the instruments necessary for hanging, which also indicate to an impulsive attempt.

Since individuals are experiencing dramatic hormonal, physical and emotional changes in adolescence period, they are often oversensitive about themselves. Individualization phases make them obtain more autonomy and rebellious against their parents' traditional rules. During this sensitive period, they tend to have psychological problems and co-existing disorders, such as substance abuse, acute depression or anxiety, which can increase the risk of suicide<sup>6,12</sup>. Beside these, previously conducted studies indicate certain cognitive distortions in adolescence through developmental phases of individuals. These cognitive distortions are described as awfulizing beliefs, low frustration tolerance, absolute demands directed at self and at others, and self-worth beliefs. In children and adolescents, irrational thinking is conceptualized in cognitive models as being a normal part of the developmental process, which gradually decrease, giving way to rational thinking in time. In these respects, irrational thinking might cause low frustration tolerance and tendency to dramatize situations and consequently results tendency to exaggerate and interpret reality in a wrong way, in psychologically normal adolescents<sup>6,9,10</sup>.

Thus, as presented in this case report, a life experience that is tolerable to adults might badly effect adolescents and lead to unexpected suicidal behaviors. The cause of suicide in presented case was unusual; however, inserting a pack of feathers of cock in his pockets displays a common suicidal motivation among adolescents. And the motivation was to punish the family members.

As a conclusion, mental health professionals and policy makers should encourage public health strategies and set educational facilities for parents, caregivers and teachers about the development phases, and bio-psycho-social problems of adolescents, which may be highly effective in prevention of such unexpected suicides.

*Conflict of interest*

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